

VZCZCXRO6848  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHNR #1259/01 1741401  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 231401Z JUN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9945  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 6596  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3236  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3108  
RUZEFAA/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RHMFIUU/CJTF HOA  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NAIROBI 001259

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N /A  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [KCRM](#) [KE](#)

SUBJECT: ISIOLO'S SECURITY PROBLEM, PART 3

REF: A. Nairobi 1242  
[1](#)B. Nairobi 1238  
[1](#)C. Nairobi 551

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Cycles of violence centered on livestock raiding are a sad reality in Isiolo District, which lies in Kenya's geographic center. Population, social, and environmental pressures as well as ineffective (sometimes damaging) government efforts to address them tend to intensify conflict.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Local, community-based efforts to advance conflict resolution mechanisms and development -- particularly District Peace Committees and the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT, a rural development initiative centered on wildlife conservation that is supported in part by USAID) -- have been hampered because of the politics associated with development, natural resource management and peace-building in the area. (Note: Because there are resources and power at stake, this is not an uncommon phenomenon with development programs. End Note.) While the goal of these programs is to support stability and peace, there are some in Isiolo who believe that the expansion of the NRT has exacerbated ethnic tensions. In addition, the problem of commercialized livestock raiding also potentially affects U.S.-supported livestock marketing programs. While it is indeed important to help pastoralists better leverage their assets, it will be important to ensure that the U.S. assistance does not inadvertently support trade in stolen livestock.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The challenges confronting the region's development and the fact of persistent conflict demand that all of Isiolo's residents work together to confront them. As long as inter-ethnic tensions dominate decision-making processes, however, lasting solutions will remain elusive. U.S.-supported programs have done much to help improve security and economic opportunities for marginalized populations in the Isiolo area; however, the challenges are enormous and powerful political and (criminal) economic interests can be destabilizing. While there are no easy answers, we are working to ensure that U.S.-supported programs adjust to the changing situation on the ground by increasing their conflict-sensitivity and inclusiveness. This is the last cable in a three-part series to describe the Isiolo region's security problems, the effect U.S. development programs have in the area, and what we are doing to promote development, conflict resolution, and stability. End Summary.

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The Northern Rangelands Trust  
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¶4. (SBU) The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) is a community-led initiative registered in 2004 whose members represent politically and socially marginalized pastoralist communities of Northern Kenya. The NRT was established as an umbrella organization to assist pastoralist communities and other stakeholders to use biodiversity conservation and improved environmental management as a means of enhancing and diversifying livelihoods. Forty-one percent of NRT's funding currently comes from USAID.

¶5. (SBU) While there are members of multiple ethnic groups within the Trust, including Borana, Samburu, Rendille, Pokot, Njemps, Somali, and Boni/Bajuni, the overwhelming perception of Isiolo residents and local government officials is that most of the human beneficiaries of this large wildlife conservation program are Samburu. (Note: The direct benefits of NRT participation include jobs and revenue from the tourism sector for member communities. The employment of game guards also provides rapid reaction capability against livestock raids, filling a gap left by the police. End Note.) Some of this can be traced to the willingness of different communities to engage with NRT. There are only a small number of Borana participants in the program, for example, and there is vocal opposition within parts of the Borana community to greater participation. Some of this can also be explained by other communities' perceptions of recent Samburu livestock raiding patterns. We heard a number of times from Borana and Somali interlocutors that inter-communal livestock raiding used to be played on an equal playing field. Once the Samburu began to benefit from the NRT, the other communities were no longer able to compete because the security provided by the conservancy game guards protects Samburu herds from counterattacks. (Note: There was no

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equivalent complaint from our Samburu interlocutors that other groups had an unfair advantage because of the benefits brought by NRT. They argued that other groups were at an advantage because of positions of political power and influence within the government. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) The presence of NRT has become a hotly debated political issue for local parliamentary candidates, and we were told that it became a campaign issue in the 2007 general elections. While this was no doubt due in part to the perception other communities had about the unequal benefits accruing to the Samburu, the NRT's strategy of engaging political leaders appears to have affected the political leaders themselves. A Borana elder told PolOff that former Isiolo MP Hajji Mokku (a Borana) had begun to lobby his fellow Borana in favor of NRT. Mokku's kinsmen, the elder said, viewed Mokku as a sellout because they had come to resent the program they saw as favoring the Samburu. Current MP Mohammend Kuti reportedly does not attend NRT meetings or allow his subordinates to do so, and so discussions with the Borana community about the workings of the NRT are now happening at the grassroots -- vice political -- level. (Note: There are multiple requests from individual communities to join the NRT, including another community in the Borana area. End Note.)

¶7. (SBU) The Borana community that currently benefits from the NRT, the Buligo-Bulesa conservancy, has felt some political pressure as well. An NRT official told PolOff that ethnic Borana rangers have lost their morale and are treated as traitors for what their fellow Borana perceive as assisting the Samburu in their raiding behavior.

¶8. (SBU) Any stoppage of NRT ranger activities or indeed the political controversy over expanding areas under conservancy management benefits livestock raiders and wildlife poachers. Indeed, NRT officials speculate that the spark that ignited the latest round of conflict started was the use by politically connected poachers of the ensuing chaos to gain a freer hand in operating in the area around Isiolo District's Merti Division (Borana territory).

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The District Peace Committee  
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¶9. (SBU) The modern concept for District Peace Committees originated in Wajir District in the early 1990s. Since then, the goals of these committees have been endorsed by the Government and semi-formalized under the leadership of the provincial administration. The National Steering Committee on Peace-Building and Conflict Management (NSC) provides policy direction and support to District Peace Committees throughout Kenya. USAID is one of several donors that have offered to provide support to the NSC and targeted District Peace Committees. However, to date, the NSC's request for USAID support has been focused on developing a national peace building policy. USAID hopes to provide the NSC and targeted District Peace Committees with assistance in the future.

¶10. (SBU) The first Isiolo District Peace Committee by many accounts was an effective one. Originally begun in 2000 to deal with a conflict between Borana and Dagodiyya (ethnic Somalis), its founders were active, committed, and not overly beholden to local politicians. However, since then their influence has waned.

¶11. (SBU) First, organizational inertia has set in. The Provincial Commissioner told PolOff that the Peace Committee would be more effective if it met more frequently, especially before conflicts happen. As it happens, it meets only when there has been a problem, and valuable time to prevent conflict is lost.

¶12. (SBU) Second, the membership of the Peace Committees may not be appropriately representative to settle disputes legitimately. When discussing meetings between the Isiolo and Samburu East Peace Committees to resolve the Samburu raiding issue, the Isiolo District Peace Committee Secretary (an ethnic Borana) told PolOff that the meetings would always go well: members on both sides would come to an agreement, but the agreements would not subsequently be implemented because the youth felt no obligation to abide by agreements reached by committee members. Others told us that youth, women, and the business community are not adequately represented on the Peace Committees.

¶13. (SBU) Finally, there are some who accuse the Isiolo District Peace Committee of being too closely linked with the political

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class. Only those who support the constituency's current Member of Parliament are allowed to be on the committee, we were told. A Turkana businessman told us that he did not know who the Turkana representative was on the committee. It had changed without notice, and it was possible there was no Turkana on the committee at all, he said. (Note: During the 2007 elections, the Turkana community rallied behind their own Turkana candidate for parliament, and he ended up coming in second place. The Turkana/Borana political rivalry appears to be continuing on the peace committee, and the Turkana appear to have lost. End Note.) Such non-transparent procedures benefit politicians, who appoint people loyal to them to serve on the committee. (Note: To be fair, provincial administration officials expressed the opposite sentiment: that the Peace Committee members were accountable to no one. The Provincial Commissioner told PolOff that some of the elders and community leaders on the committees "go too far" and could use some supervision, especially when representatives used the meetings to exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions. End Note.)

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Livestock Marketing  
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¶14. (SBU) What percentage of the livestock that appears in Kenya's livestock markets represents stolen property? Given the mystery surrounding the fate of the Samburu cattle seized in a February security operation, this is a relevant question. (Note: Ref A discusses the widespread speculation that some of the livestock seized by police was ultimately sold, not returned to their rightful owners. End Note.) It is also relevant because so many interlocutors complained that the cycles of livestock raiding are encouraged and financially backed by politicians and businessmen who in turn sell the cattle on the open market. It is a lucrative business: a single beef cow can fetch as much as \$500.

¶15. (SBU) U.S.-supported livestock marketing programs empower pastoralists to fetch better prices for their stock when they go to market. In order to do this, programs build networks of marketers, connect them with buyers, and build infrastructure designed to facilitate sales and slaughter. At a minimum, it should be possible to use these networks to get a better idea of the scope of the problem. It may also be possible to encourage networks of marketers to establish mechanisms to prevent stolen goods from getting to market.

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What Next?  
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¶16. (SBU) There are no easy answers to any of these problems. It is difficult to separate politics from conservation initiatives, conflict resolution initiatives, and development projects. Indeed, the support of the political class is critical to any program's success. However, the first step toward addressing harmful side effects is identifying them.

¶17. (SBU) U.S. support in the three areas discussed is meant to promote stability, peace, and development. To achieve this goal, targeted strategic outreach to change misunderstandings and negative perceptions about the Northern Rangelands Trust is key. The District Peace Committees are clearly a work in progress as a substitute for the breakdown of the traditional social fabric that used to manage conflict, and we are encouraging fresh thinking on this front -- particularly in light of Kenya's current youth bulge and proliferation of small arms. Finally, an analysis of how our assistance can be used to enhance awareness of and then counter potential criminal activity, such as trafficking in stolen livestock, should help defuse an already volatile situation.

¶18. (SBU) The NSC is currently engaged in a review of the District Peace Committees across Kenya, and will likely come up with even more examples of how the institution could be improved. Discussions are also ongoing about the need to target conflict mitigation activities not only to post-election violence areas, but also to Kenya's conflict-prone arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), which includes Isiolo and Samburu Districts. However, USAID's Conflict Mitigation and Reconciliation program elements are underfunded. Finally, USAID has a potentially valuable tool in its livestock marketing programs to help ensure that Kenya's cattle trade does not suffer the same fate as Sierra Leone's diamonds or Liberia's timber: illegal livestock trading should not be used to fuel conflict.

¶19. (SBU) We are intensifying mission efforts towards a

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well-targeted program to advance U.S. objectives in this region. We will engage with Washington as necessary to solicit support for a conflict-sensitive approach to development in Kenya's fragile center.

RANNEBERGER